




photo courtesy of GARRETT ELLWOOD

In her 12th season as head coach for the US Air Force Academy's women's tennis team, **Kim Gidley's** civilian status isn't the only thing that makes her stand out. Her continuous community involvement efforts underscore her belief that, even off the court, the game of tennis can make a difference in the lives of others. Kim's remarkable approach to helping other organizations raise funds has garnered her recognition in the national tennis community. She received the USTA/ITA Community Outreach National Award in December 2009, an honor given to an Intercollegiate Tennis Association coach for significant contributions in developing community-based tennis programs through multiple community venues including schools, community centers and inner city, suburban or rural programs.

To accomplish this, Kim (pictured at right with the blue visor, conducting drills during the 2009 USTA/NJTL Tennis Leadership Camp) places her players, the cadets, at various fundraising events around the Colorado Springs community in an effort to bring increased exposure to each particular charitable cause. The cadets are given one free weekend a month which Kim, and now the team captains, challenge themselves to utilize with community involvement.

"We aren't concerned about fundraising for ourselves. We want to help you fundraise for your organization," Kim says. She believes that, overall, it's good for tennis if her players are actively involved with these pursuits. Through their fundraising efforts, the players become contributing citizens in their community and in turn, the community sees tennis in a positive light. A true win-win for all.

The team offers their time to many good causes. *Servicing The Community* is a new fundraising program in which cadets get sponsored for each ace they serve throughout the season, with a minimum goal of \$1200 (the money goes to a local charity). The squad also supports American military personnel serving overseas. They send tennis-themed care packages – *Tennis* magazine, cans of tennis balls, t-shirts, and posters – to former Intermountain player Kevin Harris and his troop, currently serving with the US Army in Afghanistan.

For 2010, Kim has scheduled a number of events to promote tennis in the Colorado Springs area, from hosting a Kids Day in February to intercollegiate tennis competition throughout the summer and fall.

"Not everyone can play great tennis – but everyone can watch great tennis," says Kim. Her overall concept is to increase the exposure of tennis while participating in non-tennis related endeavors in hopes that others will get excited about tennis and come watch the great tennis matches offered in their community. It has proven to be a successful formula on many levels. 🎾

Story by **LINDA SARGENT WEGNER**

For the past three decades, *COLORADO TENNIS* (née *High Bounce* in 1977) has been bringing you profiles of local players, coaches, administrators and anyone else in the Colorado tennis community who shares their passion for the sport with others.

In each issue, we are profiling five individuals who deserve recognition for their efforts and accomplishments. As always, some you will know, while others will be fresh names and faces.

As always, we encourage readers to help us recognize others who they think deserve special recognition. Email Kurt Desautels, at EDITOR@COLORADOTENNIS.com with your suggestions.

If you're lucky enough to have met **Tyler Crippen**, you may know him as one heck of a soccer player (he played at Northwestern and still coaches.) You may know him as a devoted family man, teaming up with his wife, Sara, to raise three great children including Maria (10), Sammy (8) and TJ (5). It's possible that you know him from Cole Arts and Science Academy where he's a devoted PE teacher, or from the middle school where he coaches several sports. But it's also possible; however, that you were introduced to Tyler out on the three courts nestled in the Cole neighborhood, where his devotion to bringing the residents tennis has been a huge hit with kids and parents alike.

By all accounts, Tyler was just the right person for the job. He embraced the USTA Schools Tennis Program, started an after school program, and formed the Mitchell Tennis Club, which became a registered National Junior Tennis League Program. He also represented the Intermountain Section at the USTA Tennis Teacher's Conference in 2007. When USTA Colorado reached out to the school, Tyler quickly saw the value that it could bring to the families in the area and he didn't hesitate to commit his time and expertise to the cause.

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photo courtesy of Tyler Crippen

Story by **KATIE NEWELL**

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"Sue Burke was a big help to me in securing grants," Tyler explains, adding that he originally got involved because it "was just a good way to have a fun summer job!"

But that quickly evolved as he saw the interest level that tennis was getting from a community that normally wouldn't have the exposure. Now, approximately 60 people from the neighborhood are learning the basic skills to play tennis, understanding the rules of the game, and are forming friendships through their interaction on the court.

Kristy Harris, USTA Colorado Community Development Director, boasts that Tyler is "the model person for the job. He cares about the community, the kids, and wants to promote an active and healthy lifestyle for the neighborhood."

It's helped that he lived right across the street from the courts for so many years, and has been able to have his own children involved in the program.

"What I like the most about the program," Tyler says, "is that we're not training to be an elite tennis club. I'm getting to introduce kids to tennis and I get to see the older kids helping out with the younger players."

One such standout is Quinten Balzer, one of Tyler's young players who came through the Star Search Program, has played some tournaments, and has helped to coach the other kids for two years now. Another athlete who's made a difference to Tyler's program is Alejandra Rodriguez, now a player at East High School, who's giving back to the community by helping Tyler coach, as well. Tyler hopes that this type of community commitment by people like Quinten and Alejandra will ensure the program keeps growing and thriving down the road.

"I think seeing families out there playing that aren't your typical tennis demographic is the greatest thing. You see moms and dads, aunts and uncles, knocking the ball around and just having a great time laughing – sometimes six to a court!" Tyler laughs.

One of his favorite memories so far was that of a father and his kindergartner daughter who were out on the court with their badminton equipment hitting the birdie back and forth on the court. After an introduction from Tyler, the girl became involved in the tennis program, and the father started hitting tennis with another mom. Both were excited to be playing "real" tennis.

Tyler sees several opportunities for partnering with other programs, such as the Glenarm Recreation Center who've sent about 15 or so of their kids to the program so far. But he doesn't want the program to lose its original purpose – to give the Cole neighborhood a strong and growing tennis program. It's not an easy balance and there's only so much time for a father of three who teaches, coaches, and volunteers to the level that Tyler does so graciously.

What are Tyler's future goals? He'd love to grow family night which brings everyone out together. He'd be thrilled to see some of the kids start to enter local tournaments and get a feel for the competitive side of the sport. He'd love to get some adult racquets for the parents who want to start hitting with their kids. But mostly, he'd love to keep spreading the joy of tennis to a very worthy community. ☺

Few straight-A students describe themselves as being "defined by tennis." Fewer still plan on riding their tennis and academic prowess straight to Harvard. Just 12 years old, **Jessica Metz** has already figured out what many adults have yet to determine – her purpose in life.

A self-described "math-science geek with a wicked backhand", Jessica is a sixth-grader from Cheyenne Mountain Elementary School in Colorado Springs. She began playing tennis at the age of 4, when her dad, Brian – who worked his way through medical school as a tennis pro – would toss her tennis balls in their driveway.

Eight years later, Jessica represents Team Broadmoor, and recently became a member of Team Colorado. She finished 2009 ranked No. 19 in the state (G12s), ranking sixth in doubles. This year, she'll be competing in the 12s at Sectionals (14s and 16s locally), which in itself is a big accomplishment.

Just over a year ago, Jessica fell on the court and broke her elbow. Forced to wear a huge arm cast, she wasn't sure if she'd ever play tennis again, but she's back and playing with enthusiasm, inspired as much to win as by the social aspects of the sport.

"I have met some of my best friends [playing] tennis. It is always fun to meet someone new. I also like the feeling of being a part of something. Most of the girls I know aren't competitive athletes. I feel special and unique because most kids aren't a part of an elite athletic group. I believe that my tennis groups define most of who I am and what I like to do."

But while some young players dream of tennis stardom, Jessica plans on riding her game to a different destination. "I have a few tennis friends that want to go pro and win all of the Grand Slam tournaments. Even though I could be famous and known all over the world if I did this, I want to use my tennis to get into an Ivy League college, like Harvard, play through college, and then find a cure for cancer."

"I'm not joking," she adds, as if anyone could possibly doubt her resolve.

Keeping Jessica from heaping too much pressure on herself is one of her parent's bigger challenges.

"The key is academics always come first," says her mom, Jeannie. "Jessica is more likely to make her mark in the world in science or medicine, than in tennis... she believes this, so she plays for the love of the sport."

Love, and perhaps a bit of pragmatism. Jessica says that she will use tennis to help her earn a living, just like her dad did.

"If I need to earn some money for school, I could always walk into a club and ask for a coaching job."

This winter, Jessica and her parents began coordinating the CYTF-affiliated Racquets For All program in Colorado Springs. To spearhead the effort, Jessica stepped into the lead role as the RFA coordinator for Team Colorado and launched a racquet collection drive that has already netted more than five dozen racquets and 500 balls for the program, which helps financially challenged programs distribute gently used and new equipment to kids who may not otherwise have been able to play tennis. Tennis can be a very expensive sport, says Jessica, but that shouldn't limit opportunities.

"I started collecting racquets for the Racquets For All program because I was taught to always give back. I think everyone should have a chance to try it, so maybe if someone without a lot of money is given a racquet, they too could learn to love the sport."

And it is this love of the sport that Jessica's parents have cultivated.

"Jess always works hard, has a great attitude and never gives up on the court," says her mom. "That is what our family defines as success."

Whether she ultimately becomes an oceanographer, a veterinarian, a doctor, scientist, or a physical therapist (all currently on her list), Jessica has identified her goal in life: "Hopefully, I'll make a difference in the world, like finding cures or important information to help people."

Jessica has her whole adult life to find cures, but for the kids who have already been on the receiving end of her generosity, she's already made a difference in their world. ☺



photo courtesy of the Metz family

Story by
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